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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER PROVIDES AHMEDINEJAD VISIT
DETAILS; GOI LTSR TEAM READY

REF: STATE 19473

1. SUMMARY. During a February 28 meeting, Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari told Political Counselor Matt Tueller and NSC Senior Director for Iraq and Afghanistan Brett McGurk that he would urge the Iranians to avoid making inflammatory statements directed at the United States during President Ahmedinejad's March 2-3 visit to Baghdad. In a phone conversation with PolCouns later that day, Zebari said the Iranians agreed and asked the USG to refrain from actions or statements that would detract from the visit. Zebari reported the Arab League delegation was pleased by its February 24-27 visit to Baghdad and would convey to its leadership and members that Arab countries must increase diplomatic representation here. The Foreign Minister confided he has career diplomats in mind for ambassadorial appointments to key Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt. The GOI plans to send Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi to the Damascus Arab League summit but recognizes that the Lebanese presidential elections may require down-grading or postponing the conference. Dates for Neighbors Border Security and Refugee Working Groups are still pending, and Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed Abbawi, who was also at the meeting, said that if the Government of Jordan was not more forthcoming on the issue, the GOI would consider changing venues. Zebari was upbeat about the MFA's Long Term Security Agreement (LTSR) team, saying they were ready and had done their homework. He tempered this by providing his oft-repeated warning that Iran would attempt to scuttle the process. He noted that both the Iranians and Syrians fear the consequences of an agreement, but other countries in the region were more supportive and some even "jealous" of Iraq. END SUMMARY.

Ahmedinejad Visit

2. (C) Zebari did not have a schedule in time for the meeting, but provided one later that day. (Note. Post circulated the Arabic version via e-mail and will follow up with a translation as soon as it is available. End Note.) On Sunday March 2, President Ahmedinejad will meet with senior GOI leadership, representatives of the Yazidi and Sabeen communities, and hold several press conferences. On Monday, Ahmedinejad will visit the Kadhimiyyah Shrine in Northeast Baghdad but will not travel to Karbala and Najaf. Despite initial reports that Ahmedinejad would call on Prime Minister Maliki at Maliki's International Zone office, it now appears all meetings will take place outside the IZ at President Talabani's compound.

3. (C) PolCouns emphasized that the Iranians should refrain from statements attacking the United States during the visit; but, if they did not, that we expected the GOI to condemn the rhetoric. PolCouns also urged Zebari to convey to the Iranians that the GOI views much of what Iran is doing in

Iraq as dangerous and unhelpful. Zebari agreed and suggested Ambassador Crocker pass the same message to the Executive Council. Zebari also mentioned that the Prime Minister may be traveling to Tehran shortly after Ahmedinejad's visit.

¶4. (C) Later the same day, Zebari called PolCouns to say he had met with the Iranian advance team and conveyed the message that the visit should not be the occasion for contentious public statements or America bashing. The head of the advance team said he agreed completely and would send the message back to Tehran. He asked in return that Zebari pass to us that the Iranians expected reciprocity and that during the visit the USG should refrain from any actions or statements that would detract from the visit. Zebari said the advance team was very pleased to learn the U.S. wanted a smooth visit with no incidents and would be in touch with his staff to make sure there were no movement conflicts or other logistical problems.

Arab League Delegation

¶5. (C) Zebari reported the Arab League delegation led by Deputy Secretary General Ahmed Ben Hilli was pleased with their February 24-27 Baghdad visit. Their message to AL leadership and members will be that the meager Arab diplomatic presence in Baghdad is unacceptable. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Libeed Abbawi, the Delegation's meeting with the 4 (mostly lower level) resident Arab representatives cemented the delegations impression. Vice President Tariq el Hashimi delivered a particularly strong message emphasizing that other Arab states should not be frightened by Iraq's burgeoning democracy.

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Iraqi Ambassadors to Key Arab Countries-Swedish Embassy

¶6. (C) For key Arab countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Zebari wants to use career ambassadors, who can be appointed outside the normal, time-consuming confirmation process. PolCouns noted that some countries were citing the lack of Iraqi appointees as an excuse not to act on their commitments to establish missions in Baghdad. Without being specific, Zebari claimed he had candidates in mind and hoped to move forward quickly. PolCouns mentioned that Embassy Baghdad had been in touch with KSA and GoK about logistics and repeated our offer to assist in this matter. Zebari reported that the day before a Swedish technical team had been in Baghdad and settled on a site for a Swedish Embassy.

Arab League Summit

¶7. (C) PolCouns delivered reftel demarche and Zebari said that Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi would attend if the summit takes place in Damascus, but he acknowledged turnout will be poor because of ongoing Syrian interference with the Lebanese presidential process. He thinks that without a resolution by March 11 to the Lebanese presidential crisis, neither the Egyptians nor the Saudis will attend the summit. PolCouns said the USG supported the Arab League position on the issue and if by March 11 the Lebanese fail to elect a president, countries should either not participate or the summit should be moved. Zebari thinks other alternatives may include holding a lower-level meeting in Damascus or postponing the event. PolCouns urged the GOI to consider carefully what the SARG is doing in Lebanon before sending representatives to a Damascus meeting.

Kosovo Recognition

¶8. (C) The subject came up at the last Ministerial Committee on National Security meeting and Zebari argued

that, in this case, Iraq should lead because the decision involved a Muslim nation emerging from a traumatic recent past. Other voices urging the GOI to follow the Arab lead prevailed and Zebari said Iraq will wait for an Arab consensus to emerge before recognizing Kosovo.

Neighbors - UNHCR Pledge

¶9. (C) Zebari related that the SARG now wants to hold the Border Security Working Group after the Damascus Arab League Summit, perhaps during the first week of April. Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi added that the Jordanians have not responded to three GOI requests to set a date for the Refugee Working Group and suggested that if the GOJ was not more forthcoming, the GOI would move the meetings. Both Zebari and Abbawi said they wanted repatriation to be the focus of the Refugee Working Group. Zebari assessed, however, that a convoluted affair involving a yacht Saddam Hussein may have given to King Fahd of Saudi Arabia who in turn gave it to King Abdullah of Jordan was further complicating relations between the two countries. (Note: The vessel is in Nice, France, and pursuant to the GOI's motion, a court ordered it impounded. The GOI is not satisfied with the KSA title the GOJ presented and considers itself the ship's owner. End Note.) Zebari walked back from the idea of another Baghdad Prepcon, noting that heavy GOI commitments precluded a March conference and wondered if an April event, occurring so close to the Ministerial, would be useful.

Long Term Security Agreement

¶10. (C) Zebari told Senior Director for Iraq and Afghanistan that the GOI is ready to begin and have done their homework; he added that he instructed GOI Team Leader Deputy Foreign Minister Mohamad Haj Hamoud to return early (February 28) from EU trade negotiations. Senior Director noted that Ambassador Crocker hopes to sit down with Hamoud to discuss structures and procedures as soon as possible, and is encouraged by the team the GOI has assembled. Senior Director told Zebari he hoped the LTSR process would be smoother than those for the Declaration of Principals and UNSCR renewal) and that the U.S. is committed to negotiating with a broad-based team from the Iraqi side. Zebari warned that MFA/PMO relations have not improved and will continue to pose a challenge to the negotiations.

¶11. (C) Zebari told Senior Director McGurk that Iran would

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do everything it can to block the LTSR process and added it would be the main issue during President Ahmedinejad's Baghdad trip. Senior Director repeated the Secretary's LTSR message to ISCI's Abd al-Aziz al Hakim regarding Iran: it should not be seen as a threat to Iran, that the agreement is entirely about supporting Iraq and falls squarely within what Iran claims to be our mutual interests. Zebari noted that other countries in the region (other than Iran and Syria) supported the agreement--and some (KSA, Kuwait and Turkey) were even "jealous" of it. McGurk noted that the President heard similar words of support during his regional trip in January) and that we should work to use this to our advantage as the negotiations proceed.

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